

“ASPIRATION-STEP” for Women Empowerment

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Abstract:

Women's empowerment is the process in which women elaborate and recreate, what they can be & do, and accomplish in a circumstance that they previously were denied. Empowerment can be defined in many ways. One way is: Development of women in all fields leads to empowerment of women. However, when talking about women's empowerment, empowerment of women means accepting and allowing women for “ASPIRATION-STEP” who are on the outside of the decision-making process. This paper describes what “ASPIRATION-STEP” is? The acronym of “ASPIRATION-STEP” includes the aspects like gender equality, child marriage, governance, health & safety, ICT, opportunities towards growth, educational needs, development, Training programs, decision making and policies. “ASPIRATION-STEP” mentioned here gives the ideas and ideologies for women development.

Keywords: *Women's empowerment, ASPIRATION-STEP, Gender equality, Growth and Educational needs.*

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years' women empowerment has gained growing visibility as a development issue. Empowerment of women is mainly achieved by paying attention and to commit resources to women because it plays a major role in developing society. As women are key for local development, women empowerment is a lever for change that needs to be activated. But what is the definition of women empowerment? To give a generic definition is difficult as it is highly dependent on women's personal, economic and social situation within their community. But in its guidelines for women empowerment, the United Nations has provided the following overall definition: Women's empowerment has the following components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. Therefore to empower the women we need “ASPIRATION-STEP”, which is described as follows:

- * Achieve gender equality,
- * Stop child marriage,
- * Political development/Good governance,
- * Integration of women into development projects,
- * Raise aspirations of girls and their parents,
- * Awareness towards health and safety,
- * Talk to women and girls,
- * Internet as tool of empowerment,
- * Opportunities towards growth,
- * Need of women's education,
- * Schemes for women empowerment,

- * Training programs for women welfare,
- * Economic growth and decision making,
- * Policies' for women growth

ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality is the concept that all people – men and women – are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles, or prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It doesn't mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. However, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes, and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analyzed extensively in the Report of the High level Committee on the Status of Women in India, 2015.

Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last few decades. The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms, and practices. Consequently, the access of women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/ Other backward Classes and minorities, majority of whom are in the rural areas and in the informal, unorganized sector – to education, health and productive resources, among others, is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded. The government has recognized these paradoxes and attempted to address these in policies, legislation and programmes. Development programmes introduced to bring gender equality have produced mixed results. Legislative changes have faced resistance in their implementation due to social, cultural and religious mores.

STOP CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage in India: According to the Indian law, marriage age for the women is above 18 and the man is above 21. Most child marriages involve underage (women), many of whom are in poor socio-economic conditions.

Several states of India have introduced incentives to delay marriages. For example, the state of Haryana introduced the so-called *Apni Beti, Apna Dhan* program in 1994, which translates to "My daughter, My wealth". It is a conditional cash transfer program dedicated to delaying young marriages by providing a government paid bond in her name, payable to her parents, in the amount of Rs.25,000 (US\$350), after her 18th birthday if she is not married.

Laws against child marriage

- The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929
- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006
- Legal Action on Legal Confusion
- CEDAW

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT/GOOD GOVERNANCE

Political empowerment supports creating policies that would best support gender equality and agency for women in both the public and private spheres. Popular methods that have been suggested are to create affirmative action policies that have a quota for the number of women in policy making and parliament positions. As of 2017, the global average of women whom hold lower and single house parliament positions is 23.6 percent. Further recommendations have been to increase women's rights to vote, voice opinions, and the ability to run for office with a fair chance of being elected. Because women are typically associated with child care and domestic responsibilities in the home, they have less time dedicated to entering the labour market and running their business. Policies that increase their bargaining power in the household would include policies that account for cases of divorce, policies for better welfare for women, and policies that give women control over resources (such as property rights). However, participation

is not limited to the realm of politics. It can include participation in the household, in schools, and the ability to make choices for oneself. Some theorists believe that bargaining power and agency in the household must be achieved before one can move onto broader political participation.

INTEGRATION OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

Women have been largely excluded from the development effort in most countries of the world. Each country must develop a strategy for integrating women into national development and for combating attitudes that women's role. Studies are needed on the factors that facilitate or constrain the provision of wider opportunities for women, and coordinated programs to modify the traditional attitudes that work against female equality are required. Efforts should be made to improve the earning power of rural women and to integrate them in campaigns to modernize the rural economy. At the same time, attention should be given to easing the burden of women's routine household chores. Highest priority should be given to the task of providing skills to unskilled women.

AWARENESS TOWARDS HEALTH AND SAFETY

Good Health and Well-Being is defined to be the third Sustainable Development goal and it is directed towards achieving universal health coverage and providing accessible medication and vaccines. Over the past few years, the UN has drastically improved lifestyle conditions such as life expectancy, reduced child mortality rates along with maternal mortality rates and lowered the rate of spread of infections such as HIV and AIDS. Contrastingly, just these facts are not enough to presume the completion of the goal, as there are still strives that need to be made.

Women's safety is one of the most prevalent issues in the modern day and it is commonly observable whether it is through the presence of malnourishment or female infanticide. Statistics suggest that a whopping 56.2% of Indian women suffer from anemia, which could result from poor intake of food lacking in iron. More often than not, it is likely that the problem would go undiagnosed in households, which consequently lowers the quality of life that one can live. Promoting a healthy diet amongst individuals has become a necessity and while more and more schools have begun incorporating this into their education system, there is still a need for awareness in the rural parts of the country.

INTERNET AS TOOL OF EMPOWERMENT

The growing access of the web in the late 20th century has allowed women to empower themselves by using various tools on the Internet. With the introduction of the World Wide Web, women have begun to use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter for online activism. Through online activism, women are able to empower themselves by organizing campaigns and voicing their opinions for equality rights without feeling oppressed by members of society. For example, on May 29, 2013, an online campaign started by 100 female advocates forced the leading social networking website, Facebook to take down various pages that spread hatred about women. In recent years, blogging has also become a powerful tool for the educational empowerment of women. According to a study done by the University of California, Los Angeles, medical patients who read and write about their disease are often in a much happier mood and more knowledgeable than those who do not. By reading others' experiences, patients can better educate themselves and apply strategies that their fellow bloggers suggest.

With the easy accessibility and affordability of e-learning (electronic learning), women can now study from the comfort of their homes. By empowering themselves educationally through new technologies like e-learning, women are also learning new skills that will come in handy in today's advancing globalized world.

OPPORTUNITIES TOWARDS GROWTH

The economic impact of achieving gender equality in India is estimated to be US\$700 billion of added GDP by 2025. The IMF estimates that equal participation of women in the workforce will increase India's GDP by 27 percent. More than half of India's women don't have cellphones, and 80 percent don't use them to connect them to the internet. If as many women as men had phones, it could create US\$17 billion in revenue for phone companies in the next 5 years. Globally, women make or influence 80 percent of buying decisions and control US\$20 trillion in spending. There are also social benefits to empowering women. Women spend 90

percent of their income on their families, and economically empowered women boost demand, have healthier and better-educated children, and raise human development levels. One in three private sector leaders reported that profits increased as a result of efforts to empower women in emerging markets.

“You have to look at resources on the one hand and agency on the other hand. A good combination and balance between the two allows you to have practical outcomes. Degree of agency can be defined as possibility of making free choice. Resources are material conditions around. Women’s empowerment is about the development of different kind of capabilities, and the process of transforming them into functioning. The questions should be: what are the resources brought by a project that could enable women to have access to different kind of outcomes in their day-to-day life?”

The Government of India’s MUDRA scheme to support micro and small enterprises and direct benefit transfers under the Jan Dhan Yojana seeks to empower women. Women entrepreneurs account for about 78 percent of the total number of borrowers under MUDRA.

NEED OF WOMEN’S EDUCATION

Nelson Mandela had rightly said Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world. Educated women will have better position and respect in the society and family; also they can better understand their rights. For example a woman police officer is more likely to be more sensitive to women issues, hence can work for their empowerment and safety.

SCHEMES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

11 Important Women Empowerment Schemes in India are

Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao Scheme aims to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services meant for girls. It is launched on 22-Jan-2015. Initial Funding is 100 cores. The objectives are to prevent sex-selective abortion, to ensure survival, protection & education of a girl child.

One Stop Centre Scheme Aims to provide support and assistance to women affected by violence both in private and public spaces. The Scheme will be funded through Nirbhaya Fund. The objectives are to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof, to facilitate immediate emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services including medical, legal, psychological and counseling support to fight against any forms of violence against women.

Women helpline scheme is a scheme meant to provide 24 hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence. It is launched on 01-April-2015. The objectives are to provide toll-free 24-hours telecom service to women affected by violence seeking support and information, to help crisis and non-crisis intervention through referral to the appropriate agencies such as police/Hospitals/Ambulance services/District Legal Service Authority (DLSA)/Protection Officer (PO), to provide information about the appropriate support services, government schemes available to the woman affected by violence Call to any of the following Women Helpline Nos. Call to Women's Helpline: 181 Toll free Call to 1091- Police Helpline, 102 (hospital/Ambulance) & 108 (Emergency Response Services) Contact to One Stop Centre (OSC).

Working Women’s Hostel (WWH) is a scheme envisages provision of safe and affordable hostel for women. The main objective of the scheme is to promote availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women with day care facility for their children wherever possible in urban, semi urban or even rural areas where employment opportunity for women exist.

Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) for Women aims to make a significant impact on women by upgrading skills. The target group includes the marginalized asset less rural women and urban poor. This also includes wage labourers, unpaid daily workers, women headed households and families below poverty line. The objectives are to mobilize women in small viable groups and make facilities available through training and access to credits, to provide training for skill upgrading, to enable groups of women to take up employment-cum- income generation programs, to provide support for further improving training and employment conditions of women.

SWADHAR Greh Scheme(2001) aims to provide temporary accommodation, maintenance and rehabilitative services to women and girls rendered homeless due to family discord, crime, violence, mental stress, social ostracism. Another scheme with similar objectives is Short Stay Home (SSH). The objectives are to cater to the primary need of shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment and care of the women in distress and who are without any social and economic support, to enable them to regain their emotional strength that is affected due to their encounter with unfortunate circumstances, to provide them with legal aid and guidance to take steps for their readjustment in family or society, to rehabilitate them economically and emotionally, to enable them to start their life as fresh with dignity and conviction.

Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme is for the children of working mothers to take care of the children. It is launched in 2012, It was revamped in 2016, the present scheme will provide assistance to NGOs for running crèches. The objectives are to providing a nursery where babies and young children are cared for during the working day. Employment of women has resulted in increased opportunities for their employment and more women are now working within or outside their homes, thus the children of these women, who were earlier getting support from relatives and friends while their mothers were working now in need of day care services which provide quality care and protection for the children.

Indira Gandhi Matriva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) is a Conditional Cash Transfer Scheme for pregnant and lactating (P&L) women to contribute to the better environment by providing cash incentives for improved health and nutrition. The beneficiaries are paid Rs.4000 in three instalments per P&L woman between the second trimesters till the child attains the age of 6 months on fulfilling specific conditions. It is launched in October 2010. The objectives are promoting appropriate care and institutional service utilization during pregnancy, delivery and lactation, encouraging the women to follow (optimal) nutrition and feeding practices, including early and Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, providing cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and lactating mothers.

Mahila e-Haat aims to strengthen financial inclusion of Women Entrepreneurs in the economy by providing continues sustenance and support to their creativity. The objectives are- Mahila E-Haat is an initiative for meeting needs of women entrepreneurs, this startup Rashtriya Mahila Kosh website leverages technology for showcasing products made/manufactured/sold by women entrepreneurs, and they can even show their services of their creative potential. This unique e-platform will strengthen the socioeconomic empowerment of women, to act as a catalyst by providing a web-based marketing platform to the women entrepreneurs to directly sell their products, to support 'Make in India' through online marketing platform.

Mahila police volunteers-The Role of Police is pivotal in ensuring the safety and security of citizens in general and women in particular, to increase the number of women in the police force. The objectives are-an MPV will serve as a public-police interface in order to fight crime against women, the broad mandate of MPVs is to report incidences of violence against women such as domestic violence, child marriage, dowry and violence faced by women in public spaces, she will act as a role model for the community.

National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW)-It is an initiative of the Government of India for empowering women holistically. It is launched in 15-August-2011. The objective is to strengthen the conceptual and programmatic basis of women-centric schemes implemented. Training & Capacity Building to enhance and strengthen understanding of gender issues, build a Resource Pool (trainers) at the National and State level to bridge gaps between knowledge and practice will be the other focus area of NMEW

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DECISION MAKING

Economic empowerment increases women's agency, access to formal government programs, mobility outside the home, economic independence, and purchasing power. Policy makers are suggested to support job training to aid in entrance in the formal markets. One recommendation is to provide more formal education opportunities for women that would allow for higher bargaining power in the home. They would have more access to higher wages outside the home; and as a result, make it easier for women to get a job in the market.

Strengthening women's access to property inheritance and land rights is another method used to economically empower women. This would allow them better means of asset accumulation, capital, and bargaining power needed to address gender inequalities. Often, women in developing and underdeveloped nations are legally restricted from their land on the sole basis of gender. Having a right to their land gives women a sort of bargaining power that they wouldn't normally have; in turn, they gain more opportunities for economic independence and formal financial institutions.

Race has a huge impact on women's empowerment in areas such as employment. Employment can help create empowerment for women. Many scholars suggest that when we discuss women's empowerment, discussing the different barriers that underprivileged women face, which makes it more difficult for them to obtain empowerment in society, is important when examining the impact of race in connection to employment. Significantly examining how opportunities are structured by gender, race, and class can transpire social change. Work opportunities and the work environment can create empowerment for women. Empowerment in the workplace can positively affect job satisfaction and performance, having equality in the work place can greatly increase the sense of empowerment. However, women of color do not have the same accessibility and privileges in work settings. Women of color are faced with more disadvantages in the work place. Patricia Parker argues that African American women's empowerment is their resistance to control, standing up for themselves and not conforming to societal norms and expectations. In connection to power, feminist perspectives look at empowerment as a form of resistance within systems of unequal power relations. Within the societal setting of race, gender, and class politics, African American women's empowerment in work environment "can be seen as resistance to attempts to fix meanings of appropriate identity and behavior, where such meanings are interpreted as controlling, exploitative, and other-wise oppressive to African American women." When talking about women's empowerment, many scholars suggest examining the social injustices on women in everyday organizational life that are influenced by race, class, and gender.

Another popular methodology for women's economic empowerment also includes microcredit. Microfinance institutions aim to empower women in their community by giving them access to loans that have low interest rates without the requirement of collateral. More specifically, they aim to give microcredit to women who want to be entrepreneurs. The success and efficiency of microcredit and microloans is controversial and constantly debated. Some critiques claim that microcredit alone doesn't guarantee women have control over the way it is used. Microfinance institutions don't address cultural barriers that allow men to still control household finances; as a result, microcredit may simply be transferred to the husband. Microcredit doesn't relieve women of household obligations, and even if women have credit, they don't have the time to be as active in the market as men.

POLICIES' FOR WOMEN GROWTH

Whatever improvement and empowerment women have received is especially due to their own efforts and struggle, though governmental schemes are also there to help them in their endeavour. In the year 2001, the Government of India launched a **National Policy for Empowerment of Women**. The specific objectives of the policy are as follows:

- Creation of an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- Creation of an environment for enjoyments of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all political, economic, social, cultural and civil spheres.
- Providing equal access to participation and decision making of women in social political and economic life of the nation.
- Providing equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public life etc.
- Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.
- Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal agency for all matters pertaining to welfare, development and empowerment of women. It has evolved schemes and programmes for their benefit. These schemes are spread across a very wide spectrum such as women's need for shelter, security, safety, legal aid, justice, information, maternal health, food, nutrition etc., as well as their need for economic sustenance through skill development, education and access to credit and marketing.

Various schemes of the Ministry are like Swashakti, Swayamsidha, STEP and Swawlamban enable economic empowerment. Working Women Hostels and Creches provide support services. Swadhar and Short Stay Homes provide protection and rehabilitation to women in difficult circumstances. The Ministry also supports autonomous bodies like National Commission, Central Social Welfare Board and Rashtriya Mahila Kosh which work for the welfare and development of women. Economic sustenance of women through skill development, education and access to credit and marketing is also one of the areas where the Ministry has special focus.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, it can be said that women in India, through their own unrelenting efforts and with the help of Constitutional and other legal provisions and also with the aid of Government's various welfare schemes, are trying to find their own place under the sun. And it is a heartening sign that their participation in employment- government as well as private, in socio-political activities of the nation and also their presence at the highest decision making bodies is improving day by day. However, we are still far behind in achieving the equality and justice which the Preamble of our Constitution talks about. The real problem lies in the patriarchal and male-dominated system of our society which considers women as subordinate to men and creates different types of methods to subjugate them. The need of us is to educate and sensitize male members of the society regarding women issues and try to inculcate a feeling of togetherness and equality among them so that they would stop their discriminatory practices towards the fairer sex. For this to happen apart from Government, the efforts are needed from various NGOs and from enlightened citizens of the country. And first of all efforts should begin from our homes where we must empower female members of our family by providing them equal opportunities of education, health, nutrition and decision making without any discrimination.

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